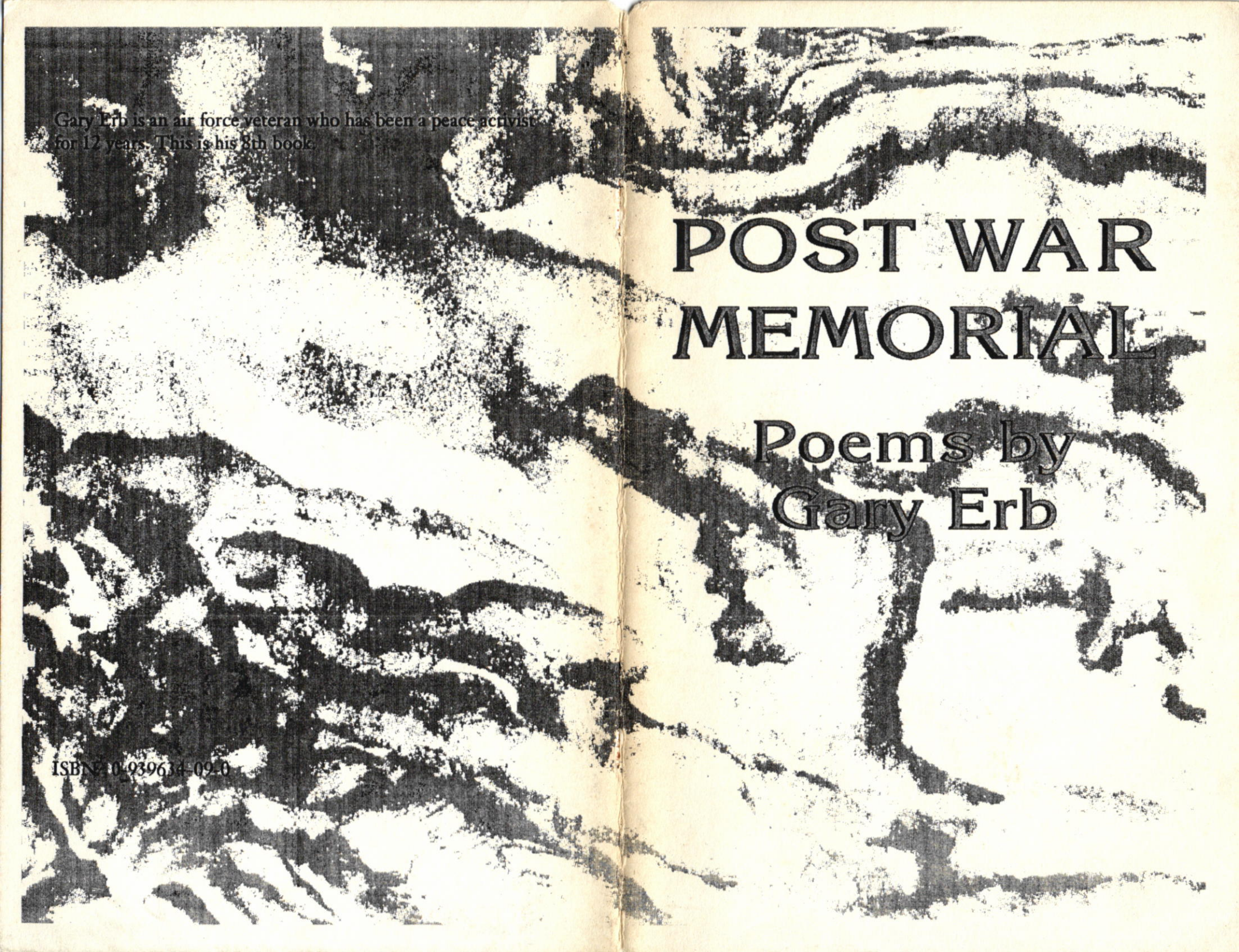




Gary Erb is an air force veteran who has been a peace activist
for 12 years. This is his 8th book.

POST WAR MEMORIAL

Poems by
Gary Erb

ISBN 0-939634-09-0

MORNING IN WINTER

The ridge blurred by the distance.
Its white against the blue.

This southwest wind
Has unburdened the trees
And uncovered the brown valley floor.
One great sigh of 3 hours,
Twelve, and now twenty,
Perhaps for a week,
Month or one minute longer.

Sigh that would swallow
The split second speech
Of the mightiest cannon,
As the rolling sea
Will swallow the wake
Of the menacing
Carrier fleets,
As the quiet earth
Will swallow the marble monuments
And their lies.

As silences
After the winds
Swallow all histories

POST WAR MEMORIAL

by Gary Erb

of living shoots up, "I can make it to the next payday."

Balance has to tip so lopsided that it tips over. Then people will move.

But hey, it's your turn. Tell me why there's hope.

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Contact Laughing Waters Press, 864 - 18th,
Boulder, Colorado 80302

ISBN 0-939634-09-0



recycled paper

YOU TELL ME

Dedicated to Philip Berrigan and to all those who speak up for the oppressed when they know it means joining them.

I used to be registered.

Used to be a Democrat. But last election I voted for an independent.

Went in and pulled the lever on the slot machine, then I went out and picked up a 12 foot pole. Had a tumbleweed on one end of it and a plucked, dressed chicken on the other. Bush and Quale. Me at the balance. Carried that thing from where Federal ends, that's where my poling place was, near the city limits, and I carried that thing to the other end of Federal. Symbolic. Didn't say anything.

I put in my 3 years. Went to the war, did my time and was honorably discharged.

I was in Cambodia. In 66! We were supposed to be in Vietnam, but I got a gimpy leg from Cambodia. Saw a lot of guys die there. But you won't find their names on no monuments.

Tell you about John Q. American. I was in the barracks with them 3 years, all colors, all parts of the country, and 2 out of 3 of them, all colors, is an ignorant cuss. Couldn't see where he was going or behind where he had been. Send them to school 12 years and feed them horseshit and they don't want to hear anything else.

Life is nothing but cutthroat. I say I'll do this yard for \$10, and you say you'll do it for 8 and cut my throat. Then I'll say I'll do it for 7 and cut yours. Next thing I'm working for less than minimum wage.

But all people see is their own immediate interest. "My wages are cut, but at least I'm working." Wages go down, cost

THE PROGRESSIVE

The Chinese symbol for crisis is also the symbol for opportunity. Now that the military masturbation in the gulf is over people are waking up.

Just remember, it isn't we win or they win. Everybody has to win. And we're in it for the long haul. Education is the key.

Huh? Well... some people live one way and some another. If you own your own home you have to drive to get around.

And you can't alienate people by threatening their jobs and their lifestyles. If we have 80% of the world's wealth it's because they have to create more national wealth. And they'd do it if we gave them more assistance.

All confrontation does is provoke people to violence. You can't say things like criminal. That turns people against you.

We need to show them we're patriotic too.

But there's no stopping an idea whose time has come.

THE CANDIDATE'S LIBERAL ADVISOR

The main thing is don't get identified with extremists. Don't repeat anything that the women's and peace movements are saying.

Sure, mainstream america wants more money into education and infrastructure. They know what *real* strength is.

Iraq was a victory. But it's history. Forty days, 100,000 people killed. Now what?

We're in a new war. One against the Japanese and Germans. We have to fight and win that war, not the one we just finished.

Now I don't mean be a Japan basher. They're racists and bigots. But a stopped clock is right twice a day. Anyway, the *whole world* looks to us for leadership. The *whole world* wants us to shape the next century.

And we'll have to use force sometimes to protect our interest. Say you're ready to. We can win this one.

AT THE VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL

The mission hat covers his bald spot.
A paunch breaks the line
Of his camoflag shirt.

He speaks loud and proud
When two high school boys stop.

"It'll be different this time.

Civilians won't tell us how much to bomb.
And what not too.

Now we can load and lock.
Do our job."

A smiling woman says,

"It took me two hours to get home from work yesterday.
'Peace' protesters blocking the road.
They don't care about anyone."

Another says,

"My husband, he's on the wall there,
He went while they protested.
I hope they shoot them."

Along the wall

Shuffling, silent folk

Who do not see each other.

Each skimming through fifty four hundred
And sixty two

Unique names

To see one

COMMON GRAVES

On a white cross in France
Three names and the legend,
"Comrades In Arms."

They could not be sorted
After the mortar round hit.
But they found the dog tags.

By a smoldering village
A row of fresh mounds.
Not one of them 4 feet long.

Their markers the same
As the ones that are crumbling.

BOMB PLANT

The day I heard that this guy I went to high school with was
killed in Vietnam, I went and sat in the road with the students
who were out on strike. And this guy comes along in a pickup
truck with a railroad tie on his front bumper and tries to mow
us down.

We got out of the way fast!
Mother's Day, 1968. Besides him we let a florest truck
through.

But I went to school to get my degree. But damnit, every-
one has a degree now. You want your own home, want a decent
lifestyle, it's not what you know but who you know. Most places
anyway.

The company hired fourteen hundred new employees at
the plant, and they're all sittin' in the trailers. Training.
They're all clerical-administration types.

Ones were working with plutonium are sitting on their
duffs. That's their one claim to fame. "I work with plutonium."
So they deserve all that pay.

But I gotta keep my job. We all have to keep our jobs. It's
a matter of survival.

A LETTER LEFT AT THE STATUE IN THE PARK

Dear Daddy,

I know if you was here you be the best daddy in the world. I wudnt have to go to Aunt Ester because mama say somebody shoot me here.

If you was here Robertas face wudnt been bloun all off because you blow them away.

And no ladis say Peggy does bad things and all. Not with you here.

I tell all the kids my daddy was the badest airborn ranger in Grenada.

The president say so in a letter he send mama.

They say I never had no daddy. But I know you my daddy. And if you was here nobody would give us shit.

*I know mama want's me to do better in school.
But none of them cares.*

NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD

A horse shoe bend in the Mississippi
Commanded by verdant palisades.

Each state's elaborate spire of stone
Standing in ranks on the field of the killing.

Inscriptions in fixed focus range

Of the car road that weaves through them perfectly.

"They were Ohioans...

We are grateful..."

"They were Missourians..

We are grateful..."

The dead, blue and gray,

Are ranked in their separate yards.

The shallow cut names barely visible now.

THE VETERAN

I tell him it takes no guts at all to kill a man with a weapon. None. What it does take is fear!

At Fort Benning my DI said, "The spirit of the bayonet is kill, kill, kill, and you'll never make it MacBride."

You're a slimy turd. You're a civilian pansy. You're a maggot.

When you have to fire from ambush you're hearing him say that.

Back home, when we hunted, we wouldn't let an animal suffer. Sometimes I'd finish them off like that.

But it comes back to you. Some time, years later, you wake up soaked and wet and screaming.

I try to tell him. But he sees Rambo, Chuck Norris on TV, cops and robbers shows... Good guys kill bad guys and nobody's bothered by it.

I try to tell him. But how can I compete with that?

I knew a vet. He was CEO of his own computer business.

On the day they bombed Baghdad he put a pistol to his head and blew his brains out. That happened across the country.

WHO DOESN'T?

Sure.

Who doesn't want money into other things? I was in the army. And let me tell you, they pay top dollar for everything. For every little thing there has to be this document and that document. The reason for those \$1000 wire wrenches is all that government bureaucracy.

But I don't have to tell you how crazy the rest of the world is.

Like when Reagan went into: what was that place? It was in the Caribbean. Grenada. Good thing we could make that response to the crisis.

I don't know about all these things. But he said we had to. I believe him.

So I think we should hang onto nuclear warheads. And those things naturally get improved.

With the rifle sitting up next to me.
 Could of put a few down if they started.
 I wore the pistol everywhere.
 Greatest portion of Black people say,
 "You gonna get killed.
 They gonna burn you out."
 But my fear finally grew out of me.
 I'm ready to fight now.
 I'll die and go to hell
 'Fore I'll be treated like a dog.
 'Cause young folks now
 They ain't saw what I saw.
 The white man will take what he can take from you.

DISTURBING THE PEACE

Early, before the crowds gather,
 The vanguard of mounted police
 Send the raged men fleeing.
 Men who remember Saigon.
 Behind a phalanx of color guards
 The infantry marches in desert fatigues.
 Their column length takes exactly
 A 45 second bite to pass.
 And then at last, turbine powered tanks,
 The honeycomb multiple missile launchers.
 The bomb burst suddenness
 Of low flying fighter bombers.
 While everyone's still looking up
 A man wearing shorts and a leg prosthesis
 Lumbers into the street.
 He carries a stack of 3 coolers.
 He pours out the first.
 "This is sand!"
 He pours out the second.
 "This is oil!"
 He pours out the third.
 "This is what it cost!"
 As the last word leaves his lips
 He cannot be seen
 For the blue men on top of him.
 The scabby spill runs red
 To the wheels of a halted Bradley.
 Replies the police captain
 To the reporter,
 "My job is to see that noone gets hurt.
 Not him, not anyone."

THEY SHOULD SEE IT ON TV

The street is level.

The brown, evil water
Pushing up from the sewers
Is banked by the curbs.

A Volkswagon sits,
Wheels wet to the axles,
Out front of the bombed out apartments.
It will be there tomorrow.

The sophomore from Amhurst
Sits with her back to a wall.
Face in her hands.
Blond tresses touching
Her folded knees.

The 5 year old
Who has been told
How her grandfather died
Wades over and hugs the American.

Says a letter to the *Post*:
"We should show all the Arabs
Our combat video footage.
Teach them a lesson."

WE HAD GUNS

I have saw men tied behind cars and drug.
Saw people walkin' down River Street
Get push off and beat t' death
By white people.
And Black people stand there.
Lookin'.

Now when I went to a meeting
My eldest boy would sit here
With my pump gun on his lap.

When they fired into my house
I just happen to be out here.
'Bout midnight they eased by,
Then turned around and came back
And turned around and came back...
Third trip's when they shot in.
My wife was shot in the knee.
Had 11 children in that same room.

They come right by me.
And I started to firn'.
Some of them buckshots hit 'em.

We always had guns.
They like to cruize by.
Most preachers were afraid
To let us use their churches for meetings.

We always had guns.
And the sherif come next day and he took my guns.
I say I'm gonna buy more guns.
That day I drove to Wainright.
Bought me an automatic 30 odd 6, a 12 guage and a .45 pistol.
Went down to Pine Bluff and cruized up and down
Where the crackers were out sippin' Cokes
Front of the general store.
Just cruized up and down real slow

They were the worse. Worse than the Germans. But they thought they knew how to run the world better than anyone. Called East Asia their Mutual Prosperity Zone. Sure we killed civilians. Over 100,000 in one night in Tokyo.

I stayed in Tokyo with a Japanese colleague of mine for 5 months. Lived in his house – ate with his family.

But they had this belief then. It had to be done.

OLD REBELS

How did you not despair
When everyone cheered the deaths of thousands?

What made you unafraid
Knowing that prison camps were ready?

Why didn't you doubt yourself
When even your loved ones were against you?

What made you not want to quit
When those you admired lied and smiled?

When nobody seemed to change
How did you never lose faith in people?

The old rebel said,
"What makes you think I did not?"

And the younger ones
Felt such relief.

HISTORY

The match girls died of sulfur fumes,
The laundresses of heat.
The mill girls died in fires
With their daughters.

Promised land,
Husbands and sons
Went for soldiers.

Militia shot down veterans
But couldn't break the strike.

The grandchildren,
Who got to school,
Learned general's and president's names.

NEW WORLD ORDER

I don't know about sanctions on South Africa. They just hurt the Black people more. And it isn't the government but Blacks killing Blacks over there. That's how it is all over Africa. In Washington D.C. Blacks are killing Blacks on every street corner.

We need a settlement that protects the white population too.

Now we've been influential. But we haven't imposed our will on anyone. We protected our security. And the Soviet Union aided Castro. He's a dictator. He overthrew a dictator, but frankly, I prefer a right wing dictator. They bring prosperity to their people with a free market economy. But Hispanics have dictatorial tendencies. We have a different heritage. Goes back to the Magna Charta.

In the Philippines - Guatemala, the per capita income is growing. There is poverty. Trouble is they get used to government subsidies and handouts and it keeps them down. Teaches them they can't make it.

Hell. There are 125 ethnic groups in America. You've been discriminated against - I've been discriminated against. But you have to overcome it. We all do. But we're all Americans. There was slavery way back when, but the people rose up and changed that.

Anyhow, we have to wait and see what kind of a world we're getting. Remember we had to drop nuclear bombs on Japan.

I went all over Korea with my son. He's an airforce captain. The Japanese occupied it from 1905 to 1945. And God!

CIA RECRUITERS AT THE CAMPUS SPORTS COMPLEX

A company in blue deploys
 Through the 8 doors and railings
 Installed for the ticket lines.
 Helmets and 40 inch clubs.
 Their heelbeat drums the concrete ramp
 To please any drill sergeant.
 Down at the temporary fence
 Plainclothesmen are emptying MACE pistols.
 Placards lie on the ground.

CIA : DEATH SQUADS "R" U.S.

Hurrahs have replaced chanted slogans.
 The body presses the fence.
 People go over singly
 Lifted by many arms
 As blue arms try vainly
 To push them back.

At the rear casualties lie in ranks,
 Their eyes being washed
 With canteens and drink bottles.

Fraternity brothers
 Picket in clown costumes.

WELFARE BUMS FOR COMMISARS

A man takes a grappel and chain from his~ pickup
 And walks up the hill to the fence. An organizer says,
 "If he pulls the fence down
 People will call it a riot!"

Says another, "So what?
 They'll call it a riot
 And turn back to digging up dandelions."

TIME

The smooth brown water
 Laughs over stones
 And curses rounding the sandbar.

At the foot of the butte
 The limestone printed with shellfish.
 In sandstone overlying it
 A brontasauris tail.

Over that fish in a dried sea bottom.
 Over that pine trunks and volcanic ash.

On the plateau over all of it
 Sheep are grazing.

THE PROUD

Sixty men run
 In 105° heat
 Because one recruit's
 Rifle was dirty.
 Later,
 When he's called outstanding,
 And 59 men cease to hate him,
 He stands with them proudly.

Comfortable in their battle dress,
 They go about in twos and fours.
 Rifles slung.
 A smile for any who speak to them.
 Armor is parked off the street.

Looking up startled,
 A 3 year old boy
 Puts his hands up and shivers,
 His back to the wall.
 The soldiers pass on in silence.
 They will tell noone of this.

HE WAS LITTLE

He was little.
 His mother could read.
 So she was the one who read.

She read the story,
 Then each of the people
 Chose to be someone.
 Jesus, disciple, publican, pharasee...

He was little.
 She then read the story again.
 Then each said in turn how he thought and felt.

He was little.
 The soldiers came for her.

He was little.
 At 12 he ran to the hills.
 At 13 they issued him arms.
 Weapon hot in his hands,
 The ecstasy of freedom
 Was his last moment.